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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000033

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, DRL/PHD, AND INL/LP  
STATE FOR CA/OCS/ACS/WHA  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HONDURAS: 13 PRISONERS KILLED BY OTHER  
PRISONERS IN APPARENT DRUG DEALING DISPUTE IN TAMARA

1. Summary: On January 5, at approximately 3pm local time, A violent conflict occurred in which 13 prisoners were killed and up to 38 prisoners injured within Tamara National Penitentiary outside of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. This was reported by both the press and by Embassy sources. It was reported that members of the Wilmer-Hernandez gang, incarcerated within the maximum-security section of the prison, clashed with other prisoners over drug territory within the prison. Two pistols allegedly used in the conflict have been discovered, one of which has been traced to the Honduran National Police. Two prison officials have been suspended and Honduran authorities are continuing to investigate. Consul General spoke with the General Director of Detention Centers at approximately 6pm on January 5 concerning U.S. citizen (AmCit) prisoners in Tamara. RSO sources provided info concerning the conflict, and PolOff and ConOff visited the prison the morning of January 6 to gather information and determine the status of the three AmCits incarcerated in the same prison. End Summary.

2. The National Penitentiary in Tamara, located approximately 15 miles from Tegucigalpa, Honduras, houses some 3,368 prisoners, though its capacity is only 1,800. The Casa Blanca section, where the massacre took place yesterday, houses approximately 400 prisoners. This area houses felons convicted of assault, bank robbery, drug trafficking, rape, kidnapping, and car theft. This particular wing is considered one of the most dangerous areas in the prison. In addition, due to their length of internment, prisoners in Casa Blanca reportedly have acquired the most privileges and abilities of procurement.

3. Though Tamara houses a large population of the two major street gangs in Honduras, Mara Salvatrucha-13 (MS-13) and Calle 18 (18), they are not believed to have been involved in the attacks. These gangs control many parts of the prison and remain a powerful force. Reports indicate that the Wilmer-Hernandez gang was responsible for the clash over probable drug dealing territory within the prison. (Note: Information about the direct cause of the attacks is still preliminary and could change as the GOH investigation progresses. RSO is currently investigating the Wilmer-Hernandez gang. End Note.)

4. On January 5, Embassy officials were informed of a violent conflict at the National Penitentiary located at Tamara. Reports indicate that during the 3pm confrontation, prisoners used homemade knives and firearms, including two semi-automatic pistols to attack other prisoners. It has been reported that 13 prisoners were killed and a varying number were wounded, anywhere from 1 to 38. Unsubstantiated reports have stated that two hand grenades were found as well. By approximately 4pm, Honduran authorities had regained control and started investigating the conflict. All other convicts were evacuated for their own safety. Reports indicate police did not shoot any of the inmates, but rather, all the murders were committed by other inmates. No perpetrators have been named yet. Extra police were brought in to support those already at the prison. President Ricardo Maduro is calling for a full investigation of this incident, as is President-elect Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya.

5. The prison director, Marvin Rajo, was suspended from his position until further notice. At least one other prison official has also been suspended. So far, one of the confiscated pistols is of police issue, but according to prison officials not from the prison police. (Note: There are multiple divisions of the police, all of which fall under the Ministry of Public Security. End Note.) According to prison officials, other firearms were involved in the conflict, at least one small caliber weapon, and a .38 revolver.

6. There were no AmCits in that section of the prison. Andrew Stephen Gole, Rafael Enrique Guardia, and David Paul Castriota, AKA Fini, are housed in different sections of the prison that were not affected by the shooting. PolOff and ConOff visited Castriotta, Gole, and Guardia the morning of January 6. All three AmCits were in good health and

professed no knowledge of the conflict. However, all seemed certain that the weapons used were obtained from prison police or police visitors. The AmCits also seemed supportive of the prison director.

17. Comment: Problems within the police and prison system have again had catastrophic consequences. Negligence, or possibly complicit corruption of prison police and prison officials, apparently provided a volatile population with the means to permanently settle conflicts and disputes. Overcrowding, poor security, poor supervision and incompetence, possibly combined with police corruption and an inadequately trained prison staff, appear to have led to a killing spree that will have far-reaching consequences for the prison system and probable jail time for some officials. Honduran prisons are a violent place: according to press reports, 28 prisoners were killed in 2005. As with the last two major prison disasters in 2003 and 2004, these deaths illuminate many of the problems within Honduras' criminal justice system that have and will continue to plague and hamper the government's efforts to provide security for its population. Post will seek to work with the new Honduran Government to urge them to work to correct these problems of crime and corruption. End Comment.

18. RSO POC for this case is A/RSO Bill Stowell. Questions concerning the AmCit prisoners at Tamara can be directed to ConOff Kathleen Corey. Human rights questions can be directed to PolOff Ben Brown.

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